

# City Currents

Winter 2015





# From the Mayor's Desk

Long range planning is an activity you should expect from your City Council. Without it problems arise seemingly out of nowhere and must be addressed on an emergency basis. That involves an inefficient use of taxpayer money and probably less desirable results. This Council understands this. We engaged our municipal planning consultant to take a hard look at our present municipal complex to the end of identifying issues that will have to be addressed at



some point in the future. It may be five years or it may be thirty years, but whatever the timeline, we know certain improvements will have to be made. The idea is not to prescribe what future Councils do, but to alert them to things that they will have to address at some point. By planning over the years, future Councils can seek the most comprehensive citizen input and will have a better chance of determining the best and more cost efficient updates than if we just waited until things get bad before beginning our planning process. We see examples of this short sighted approach all around us on Houston streets as its elected leaders now try to catch up for a lack of planning in the past. Long range planning is not an exercise in grandiose vision. It is a very disciplined and necessary attempt to be forewarned, to be prepared so the city does not have to make hasty and ill-advised decisions. Long range planning is also the best way to get the greatest citizen involvement before major decisions have to be made. I encourage you to support the city's long range planning goals by keeping informed. Just as we need to keep future leaders apprised of what is coming, we also need an informed citizenry that understands what and when is needed.

## From Council Member Dick Yehle

As you read this edition of *City Currents* I suspect you are wondering "what could be sexier than a water bill?" According to Rhonda Daugherty, West U's Finance Director, the answer is a *2015 West U Water Bill* thanks to the city's investment in new meters and a new billing system.



Last year the city began a program of replacing all of its old style mechanical meters with modern electronic meters. The \$1.9 million investment will result in meters that are less susceptible to measurement errors, can be read remotely and will last years longer than the current meters. Their ability to be read remotely means the city will save \$220,000 per year in personnel and meter reading expenses. The new equipment will also allow the city to more effectively manage billing cutoff dates and detect leaks sooner. Questions and problems customers may have with their water bills should be resolved more quickly as staff will be able to access current meter data for most inquiries from city hall.

The payment mechanism has also been brought up to date with a variety of new options being offered. Customers now have the option of paying their bills by cash, check, e-check or credit card and they can pay by automatic bank draft. Easier payment procedures will hopefully help people settle their bills on time and preclude the time-consuming process of dealing with late payments and extra fees.

With water bills now being sexy, one can only wonder what will be next; a sexy property tax bill?

# Facility Master Planning

In early 2014 the City began an exercise to create a new Master Plan for its facilities, especially those near City Hall. This was necessary to assess the size, location and quality of buildings required to deliver the high level of services demanded by West U residents. When the work was nearly done, West U Baptist Church advised the City that it intended to build a Youth Center on three of the six lots the church already owns along Amherst just west of City Hall.

It was determined that if that happened, it would directly affect the residents living on that block who would have Church buildings and parking lots surrounding their homes, and it would permanently confine all City buildings to their current locations.

Armed with ideas provided by its planning consultant, the City approached the Church with an alternative concept that would allow the Church to build its Youth Center on Milton Street next to the Church's existing parking lot. That could be accomplished in a virtually cash-free manner by swapping properties with the Church. One conceptual idea that was well received by the church was to exchange six lots that the city owns for six lots that the church owns. To further support the City's idea, a Municipal Campus concept was created, which is comprised of all the land west of City Hall on the block bounded by University, College and Amherst.

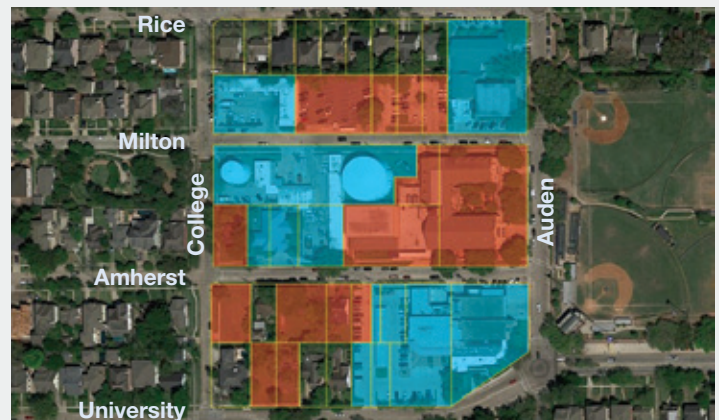
The immediate effect of the Municipal Campus concept is small but involves making arrangements to purchase the homes of the four residents with property on the Municipal Campus at market prices when they are ready to sell, and it allows the City to accomplish its goal of moving the old, unattractive Public Works Vehicle Maintenance Facility that needs replacement outside of the City Center. Several sites for that move were considered and the site of the former RecyclExpress on Dincans was deemed best in terms of its size and proximity to the City.

The City recently issued a Request for Proposal (RFP) that is expected to produce a formal offer from the Church. That offer will allow the City to negotiate terms that, with the exception of the maintenance facility, will allow the City to continue to use all of its existing facilities for perhaps 20 years while future City Councils decide how best to use the Municipal Campus. One idea is to build a new Community Building and Senior Center at the west end of the property which would allow a new, larger library to be built at its current location. With the exception of moving the maintenance facility, there will be no new developments for at least 20 years.

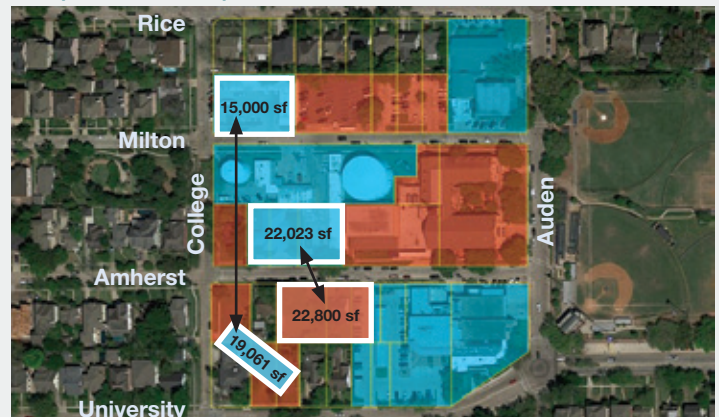
The drawings show the existing situation with the Church's proposed Youth Center on Amherst and the alternate idea with the Youth Center being located on Milton. The creation of the Municipal Campus and the exchange of properties would consolidate the Church's property ownership on the 3800 blocks of Amherst and Milton, while the City would control the Municipal Campus and the land on Milton where the City's water tanks are located. City Council anticipates finalizing arrangements early this year.

By Councilman Dick Yehle

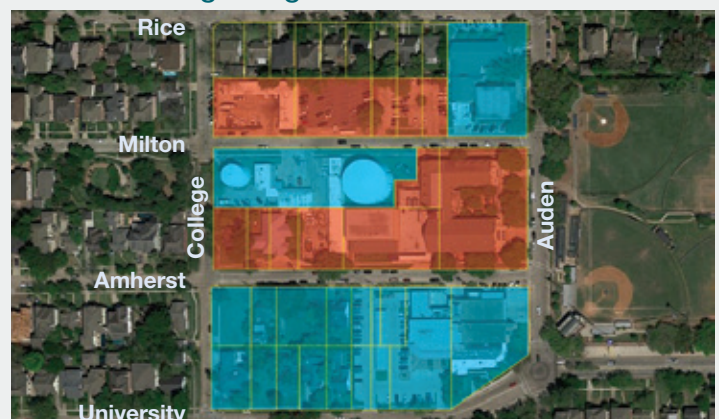
## Current Property Ownership



## Proposed Swap



## Potential Long Range Plan



City Owned Church Owned



# Parks and Recreation



## Friends of West U Parks

The 24th annual Park Lovers' Ball will be held at the Omni Hotel on Saturday evening, February 7 beginning at 7 p.m. Invitations will arrive in West U households in early January. Event Chairs Michele and Charles Still, Adrienne and William Vanderbloemen, and Christi and John Young, along with Honorary Chairs, Sue and Gary Hanna, invite you to be part of this popular annual West U gala which raises funds for our beautiful neighborhood parks. Seats are

still available with table purchases starting at \$2500 for a table for 10 and individual seats are \$250. If you have not already made your reservations to attend, please contact Friends Executive Director, Donna LaMond, at (713) 662-7430 or [DLaMond@WestUTX.gov](mailto:DLaMond@WestUTX.gov), or visit [westuparks.org](http://westuparks.org). Reservations and payments can be taken care of online through the Friends website. There will be dinner and dancing, silent and live auctions, and big board. The ball always has a few surprises in store for guests as well. Special thanks to our Elm Underwriters Mary Margaret and Russ Schulze; Tudor, Pickering, Holt & Co.; and Andrea and John T. Young, Jr., and to our Maple Underwriters BB & T; CenterPoint Energy; Sue and Gary Hanna; Marvin/Nickerson/Still/Vanderbloemen/Young Families, and Molly and Phil Sciolli. We are very grateful to our sponsors which include Direct Energy/Dinner Wine Sponsor, Kroger/Floral Centerpieces Sponsor, Bracewell & Giuliani/Bar Sponsor, Cara and

Chad Michael/Entertainment Sponsor, and to Audi Central Houston/Valet Parking Sponsor. Thank you to all of our generous underwriters and sponsors who continue to support Friends and our parks. Auction highlights include a spectacular getaway to Vail for seven days and six nights in a beautiful home located on Gore Creek in Cascade Village with seasonal ski in/ski out from lift #20 and sleeps 8–11 people; Houston Texans spring training camp experience for six boys and their dads, 12-night Southern African Splendor Photo Safari, a gorgeous black and white diamond ring donated by Christine York, and a couples dinner with Mr. and Mrs. Brian Cushing of the Houston Texans. Spooky Party is back in the sociables line up for next October, along with the annual Cinco de Mama party, and a new Marquis Party next May. These are always great parties and sell out fast at the ball.

There will be something for everyone in the auction, from trips and sporting outings, to jewelry for that special someone, and everything in between. Gather friends and neighbors and put together a table for Park Lovers' Ball.

Friends fundraising continues year around with the stork program to announce the birth of a new baby, business and community partnerships, memorials and honorariums, pavers, benches, and tree sales. For more information, please visit [westuparks.org](http://westuparks.org), or call the Friends office at (713) 662-7430.



## Deeply Rooted

PARK LOVERS' BALL 2015

## Go Ahead, Take a Guess: can you guess the number of eggs in the Di-Eggo Tower of Eggs?

Di-Eggo, the giant egg tower, will be displayed at the West U Recreation Center starting March 6. Take a guess how many eggs Di-Eggo can hold and you might just win a prize! To participate, pick up a registration form at the Customer Relations Desk at the West U Recreation Center, 4210 Bellaire Blvd. Participants must be residents of West U to be eligible for a prize. Prize winner is announced at the Easter Spring Festival on March 28.

## Easter Spring Festival & Arbor Day

The City of West University Place Parks and Recreation Department will host an Easter spring celebration, featuring an “eggs-tra” special visit from the Easter Bunny and our very own Wally the Walrus on Saturday, March 28. Admission to the event is complimentary and open to the whole family. Don't forget to stop by the West U Recreation Center to submit your guess on how many eggs Di-Eggo can hold and win a great prize! Di-Eggo will be displayed starting Friday, March 6, and we'll announce three winners during Easter Spring Festival.

## Summer Camp Registration – Mark Your Calendars!

Summer will be here before you know it and West University Place Parks and Recreation Department has the perfect camp for every interest. Choose from Building Brains LEGO Camp, Dance Camp, iKids Camp, Tennis Camp, Kidventure and more. Spaces are limited, so read the registration information below to reserve your spot today!

Please visit [www.westutx.gov/camps](http://www.westutx.gov/camps) for a complete listing of camp descriptions, dates and times, or call (713) 662-7420 for more information.

### Camp Registration Information:

- Priority Registration: (2014 campers are eligible) begins Tuesday, January 27 through Monday, February 2.
- Resident Summer Camp Registration: begins Tuesday, February 3.
- Non-resident Summer Camp Registration: begins Thursday, February 5.
- Kidventure Camp: Please visit [www.kidventure.com](http://www.kidventure.com). Registration begins Friday, January 30.

## Hiring Swim Instructors and Lifeguards!

Don't wait until summer when most of the positions are already filled to start looking for a job. Get ahead of the spring and summer hiring season and start earning seniority within the Parks and Recreation team now! The West University Place Recreation Center is looking to hire swim instructors and lifeguards starting January 1. If flexible schedules, competitive pay and a fun working environment interest you, visit the West U Recreation Center, 4210 Bellaire Blvd to fill out an application or go online at [www.westutx.gov/jobs](http://www.westutx.gov/jobs). For more information, call (713) 662-7420.

## Lifeguard Certification Courses

Are you 15 or older and looking for a great summer job, after school activity, or a challenging career in aquatics?

Lifeguarding puts you in an exciting position, working as part of a team to help people safely enjoy the water. Lifeguarding will help you develop skills and experiences that will be valued by colleges and future employers. All participants must pass a pre-requisite skills swimming test prior to taking the class that will be administered a week before class starts from 3 – 6 p.m. Three class sessions will be offered on Saturday and Sunday, March 28 – 29 (prerequisite March 21), April 18 – 19 (prerequisite April 11) and again on May 16 – 17 (prerequisite May 9) from 8 a.m. – 6:30 p.m. The price is \$170 for Residents and \$195 for Non-Residents, plus a \$35 online fee required by American Red Cross. For more information about this class, please call the Recreation Center at (713) 662-7420 or visit our website [www.westutx.gov/reg](http://www.westutx.gov/reg)



## Recreation Center and Colonial Park 2015 Fee Schedule

The 2015 Fee Schedule for the Recreation Center and Colonial Park Pool has been approved by the West U City Council and will be effective starting January 1, 2015. New fees for memberships, walk-ins, rentals, and classes are listed on the City's website, at [www.westutx.gov](http://www.westutx.gov) or you call the Customer Relations Desk at the West U Recreation Center, (713) 662-7420 for more information. Below is the new Recreation Center Fee Schedule:

### Resident Memberships

Type	Annual	Monthly EFT	Monthly (pay as you go)
Individual	\$190 R	\$20 R	\$27 R
Couple	\$250 R	\$25 R	\$32 R
Family	\$315 R	\$29 R	\$40 R
Individual Senior, 75+	Free	Free	Free
Individual Senior, 65–74	\$90 R	\$9	\$12
Couple Senior, 65–74	\$120 R	\$11	\$15
Blended Age Couple, one partner 75+	\$130	\$12	\$16
Blended Age Couple, one partner 65–74	\$190	\$18	\$23

### Resident Tennis Reservation Privileges

“Add on” to memberships	\$120 R, \$10 monthly
Non-Member: separate from memberships	\$200 R
Non-Member: walk-in reservations (1.5 hour reservation)	\$4 R

### Walk-In Fees

Daily Walk-in Resident	\$5 R, \$10 NR Guest*
Youth Public Swim	\$3 R, \$6 NR Guest*
Senior, 65–74	\$2 R
Senior, 75+	Free
Weekly Resident House Guest Pass	\$20 Individual option only
Monthly Resident House Guest Pass	\$60 Individual option only

\*Guests must be accompanied by a West U Resident

### West University Place Recreation Center (RC) and Colonial Park Pool (CP) Packaged Memberships

Individual Annual (RC) & Seasonal (CP) Resident	\$240 R
Couple Annual (RC) & Seasonal (CP) Resident	\$330 R
Family Annual (RC) & Seasonal (CP) Resident	\$440 R





## An Introduction to the West University Recycling and Solid Waste Reduction Board

The West University Recycling and Solid Waste Reduction Board, or RSWRB, is one of seven city boards and commissions comprised of residents interested in supporting the city's decision-makers. The RSWRB is appointed by and reports to the City Council. Working closely with the city's Public Works Department, it is responsible for conducting studies, making recommendations and providing community education relating to recycling and solid waste. The RSWRB is currently made up of residents of varied backgrounds and experiences, each who recognizes the value of recycling and other sound waste management principles. The RSWRB's current workplan includes, a variety of activities, including educating residents on yard waste recycling; reviewing city waste ordinances and recommending needed changes; sponsoring and participating in recycling awareness events; improving Tri-Sports recycling efforts; and, reducing waste from city operations.

Additionally, the RSWRB is one of the first groups to welcome new residents with a visit to new homeowners offering recycling and waste management information and a new "blue" recycling container. The RSWRB also conducts an annual "door hanger" project where the entire city is canvassed one Saturday morning each Spring by volunteers hanging updated recycling and waste disposal information on every door handle in the city. The Board also supports the city's Heavy Trash Day and Shredding Events held twice each year.

We also want to encourage you to sign up online for E-Alerts for recycling and solid waste information as well as other notices from the city. You can sign up by going to the city's website at <http://www.westutx.gov>, clicking on E-Notify Me and then click on the recycling and solid waste links. In addition we encourage you to visit our Solid Waste and Recycling pages as well as our Board pages on the City's website. Finally we encourage you to Like our Board's Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/westurecycles>.

On behalf of the West University Recycling and Solid Waste Reduction Board, please take the time to review your household's waste management practices and help us make West U a leader in recycling!

## City of West University Place receives new ISO Class 1 fire rating

The City of West University Place recently received an upgraded ISO public protection classification (PPC) from the Texas Department of Insurance from Class 2 to Class 1; the highest rating a city can receive. The upgrade in ISO classification is significant because Class 1 represents exemplary fire protection.

The PPC rating measures a community's structure fire suppression system capabilities and is used by most insurance underwriters as a tool to determine insurance rates for residential and commercial insurance policies. Public Protection Classifications rate communities on a scale of 1 to 10. Class 1 represents exemplary fire protection and Class 10 does not meet minimum recognition.

Through the years, the city has upgraded this rating from its original Class 5 PPC rating assigned in 1998, to a Class 2 rating in 2002 and most recently, to the top rating of Class 1. From the original Class 5 to the new Class 1, the city has reduced homeowner's insurance rates by approximately 14 percent.

The ISO rates approximately 48,000 cities and communities nationwide. Of these 48,000 communities, only 60 communities nationwide, 18 of which are in Texas, have earned ISO's highest rating, Class 1. These numbers are based on ISO's 2014 published countrywide distribution of communities.

A PPC evaluation assesses fire suppression capabilities by evaluating 3 main categories:

- 50 percent of point total - Fire Department
- 40 percent of point total - Water Distribution System
- 10 percent of point total - Emergency Communications (dispatch)

West U residents should contact their property insurance provider as residents may be eligible for a reduced property insurance premium due to the new classification.

# Do I Need a Permit?

Development Services hears this question all the time, and too often we provide the answer after construction has begun without the required permits. This stops work and increases permit fees. This helpful list is not all encompassing, but should provide general guidelines. For specific information, call us: Josie at (713) 662-5834 and Mike at (713) 662-5833.

Should a contractor tell you, “You don’t need a permit,” or “Permits cost too much and slow down the project,” call us!

YES, you need a permit for the following:

## New Fence

Replacing more than 10 ft. of an existing fence, changing height or location

## New Roof

Replace more than 200 square feet of an existing roof.

## New / Replacement Windows

## New / Replacement Water Heater

Any type

## New Electrical Work

Includes relocating existing electrical

## New / Replacement A/C Unit or Furnace

Includes replacing coil, condenser, or ducts

## New / Replacement Electrical Service or Breaker Panel

## New Whirlpool Tub, Sauna and Shower

## New Plumbing

Only exception is replacing fixtures in same location. Includes relocating existing plumbing

## New Outdoor Kitchens

## Pouring / Placing Concrete

Includes driveways, sidewalks, retaining walls, patios or landscaping wall

## New or additions to Lawn Irrigation Systems

## New Fountains, New Pool / Spa and many types of repairs

## New Walls

Over 6 inches high in front or side yards

## New Decks or Patios

Includes wood, pavers, stone and concrete

## New Porches

## New Gazebos

## New Awnings

## New Construction

Removing or relocating a wall, door or window

## New Construction

Installing a new opening in inside or outside walls

## New Kitchen Countertops

Where additional length is added

## Any New Construction: Any additions and any demolition

## New Generators, New Solar Panels, New Drainage Systems

## New Playground Equipment

If not easily movable by hand.

## Commercial Occupancy

## Commercial Build-out

## New or replacing Signs

## New Siding

Any item meeting the following Zoning Code definition of a “structure” requires a permit and a structure is defined as anything made by humans which: (i) is not readily portable; (ii) is usually left in one location for an indefinite period of time; or (iii) requires either permanent or fixed location on or in the ground or attachment to something having a permanent or fixed location on or in the ground for its use. Examples of structures, which do not limit this definition, are: sculptures; lampposts; sidewalks; driveways; playground equipment and facilities; buildings; flagpoles; antennas; and pools. A canopy or similar object designed or used to shelter a motor vehicle, a boat or similarly sized items is deemed to be a structure if it remains in substantially the same place for more than ten days, regardless of whether it is readily portable, frequently moved or unattached.

## Arbor Day Celebration

The city of West University Place will hold its annual Arbor Day celebration on Saturday, March 28, at 9 a.m. The celebration will be held in conjunction with the Parks



and Recreation Department’s Easter Spring Festival. Both events will be at the West U Recreation Center, 4210 Bellaire Blvd. Craig Koehl, West U’s Urban Forester, will be on hand to distribute handouts

and answer questions regarding planting and preservation of trees. Residents may pick up one complimentary tree per household. West U sponsors the annual Arbor Day celebration as part of our participation in the Tree City USA program, which is operated by the Arbor Day Foundation. The city has participated in the program and has been awarded a Tree City USA designation for the past 24 years. West U achieves this designation because the city meets the four standards to become a Tree City USA community: have a tree board or department, a tree-care ordinance, a community forestry program with annual expenditures of at least \$2 per capita, and an Arbor Day observance and proclamation. For additional information about the Arbor Day Foundation, visit [www.arborday.org](http://www.arborday.org). For additional information about Tree City USA, visit [www.arborday.org/TreeCityUSA](http://www.arborday.org/TreeCityUSA)

## Pet Etiquette

Cooler weather encourages us to enjoy the outdoors, often bringing our pets with us. Help keep your dog and our City safe by keeping your dog on a leash or in an enclosure at all times. Besides being the law, using a leash prevents your dog from running into traffic or accosting other pets, and it keeps other people safe from unwelcome interactions with your dog. While out walking, please be sure to clean up after your pet to avoid spreading disease and waste. You are also required to register your pet with the city’s Animal Control Officer. The cost is \$20 for a lifetime registration. Bring a copy of the pet’s rabies vaccination papers to the Public Works Building, 3826 Amherst, and fill out the registration form available there. You will receive a tag to keep as proof of registration. Your pet should wear the tag along with the rabies tag. It will help Animal Control identify your pets should they leave your yard or become lost. Periodically make sure that all enclosures where your pets are kept are secure. For more information or to ask questions, please contact the Animal Control Officer at (713) 662-5831.

# City Currents

A Newsletter for the citizens of  
City of West University Place

Spring 2015

## CITY OF WEST U OFFICIALS

**CITY COUNCIL MEMBERS** Mayor Bob Fry  
Mayor Pro-Tem Susan Sample  
Ed Heathcott  
Joan Johnson  
Dick Yehle

**CITY MANAGER** Michael Ross (713) 662-5810  
or mross@westutx.gov

**GENERAL INFORMATION** (713) 668-4441

**CITY WEBSITE** [www.westutx.gov](http://www.westutx.gov)

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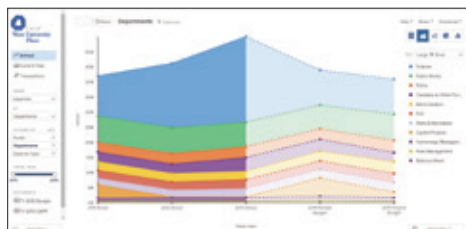
## City Launches New Financial Data Platform

This winter, the city launched a new financial data platform powered by OpenGov.com that provides residents and city officials unprecedented access to the city's budget information. The powerful visualization software transforms volumes of raw data into actionable insight and information, enabling better analysis and understanding of the city's budget.

West U's new budget transparency platform displays years of government spending and revenue detail in a user-friendly portal access at [www.westutx.gov/opengov](http://www.westutx.gov/opengov). Residents and staff can drill down into the current year budget and compare to previous years through interactive graphs that easily explain revenue and expenses by fund, department and type.

For example, if a resident is interested in the cost of street repairs in 2014, they will now have the ability to access those costs via the website portal, compare the costs with previous years, and access any other financial information.

Beyond sharing information with the public, Governments also use OpenGov internally to create custom reports, manage operations to budget, and keep administrators and legislators informed. For more information, visit [www.westutx.gov/opengov](http://www.westutx.gov/opengov)



## New Utility Bill Payment Portal Now Available to West U Residents

On December 1st, 2014, the City of West University Place launched a new and improved program for utility bill payments. The new Citizen Access offers residents the ability to view bill statements and/or pay by credit card or Echeck.

Please take note in the following changes in regards to utility bills:

### Credit card payments made online (effective December 1, 2014)

- Payments will now be accepted directly into financial software currently utilized by the city instead of through a third party.
- Residents can set up the account to make a one-time payment and determine the amount.
- If a resident is presently using a credit card or would like to use a credit card to pay, they will need to set up a new account on Citizen Access.
- MasterCard, Visa and Discover accepted.

### Pay by check online

- Echeck payments can be made on the city's website instead of through the resident's bank where they can often wait up to ten days for payments to post to their utility account. This Echeck method will allow posting to take place within 24 hours.
- No more checks lost or delayed in the mail.
- If residents are already set up with automatic draft payment, there is no need for action.

Before these changes can take place, residents will need to register their credit card information on the



secure website (as with any other utility that is paid online).

1. Go to the city's website at [www.westutx.gov](http://www.westutx.gov)
2. Choose Online Services.
3. Choose the "Pay Your Bill Online here" link.
4. Citizen Access page will appear. Set up your username and password, and start your payment process.

In December, the city's utility billing vendor erroneously sent out an insert for a city in Washington that does not relate to the City of West University Place. This insert was sent as an error and should be discarded. A new insert for West U residents was sent in a second mailing. If you have any questions about your bill or the new billing portal, please contact us at (713) 662-5826 or visit us at 3800 University Blvd.